TL1329-4

Japan and the East Timor Issue

The Government, Citizens' Movement and Public Opinion

A Paper Prepared for the 5th Symposium of Oporto University on East Timor
July 22-29, 1993, Portugal

Akihisa Matsuno
Osaka University of Foreign Studies, Japan

The Government

The official position of the Japanese government in regard to the question of East Timor is, as it has repeatedly stated, that Japan is not in a position to make a judgement on the sovereignty issue and that it is observing the negotiations between Portugal and Indonesia under the auspices of the UN Secretary-General.

In its annual *Countries of the World*, the Ministry of Foreign Affairs takes care to delineate on its maps the borders of East Timor, marking them in the same manner as other disputed areas such as Western Sahara. A Ministry of Education and Culture official said the Ministry would instruct text book publishers to draw a line on maps of the region when technically possible between East and West Timor.(1)

At the UN Japan has continued to serve Indonesia's interest by trying to block critisism of Indonesia, though at the initial stage Japan's behavior was less consistent. Japan voted for the first resolution of the Security Council in December 1975 but abstained on the second resolution of April 1976. At the Genral Assembly Japan voted against all resolutions from 1975 to 1982.

But this attitude began to change a little in March 1991 when a senior official of the Foreign Ministry asked Indonesia at the first high-level consultative administrative meeting of the two countries to pay more attention to human rights in East Timor. It should be noted, however, that japan did not raise the issue at the meeting, the statement was in reaction to a complaint by Indonesia about "the wrong perception" of some countries that people in East Timor are oppressed. And the exchange of words on East Timor only came to our attention because it was reported by a Kyodo News Service correspondent. (2) There was no official statement.

According to the Japanese ambassador to Indonesia at the time, mention of human rights in talks between Japan and Indonesia was nothing new. One year before, in talks with President Suharto in Jakarta, Prime Minister Kaifu had conveyed his concern on human rights by refering to the general importance of human rights.(3)

In January 1993 Prime Minister Miyazawa raised the issue when he met with President Suharto in Jakarta. What was different this time was that the inclusion of East Timor in the talks was announced by the local Japanese embassy at a press conference after the meeting. In other words the government took a clear decision to mention the issue even though it knew Indonesia would not like it.(4)

In March this year Japan abstained on the resolution on East Timor at the UN

Human Rights Commission. This must have been a hard decision for Japan. (Japan had voted for the "non-action" motion forwarded by Malaysia.) But this behavior showed that Japan is not always a good friend of Indonesia and that for Japan the relation with Western industrialized countries is also important.

From the government's statements at the World Human Rights Conference and the Asian regional meeting in Bangkok, we know that as far as human rights are concerned Japan wants to act in concert with Western countries, at least at the verbal level.(5)

However, despite these recent gestures, we must say the government's efforts are still too insignificant to bring about any change in the present stalemate.

The government still refuses to apply its newly adopted aid principles, the Official Development Assistance Charter, to the case of East Timor. This ODA Charter was adopted by the Miyazawa cabinet in June last year and articulates that, when development assistance is to be provided, full attention should be paid, among other things, to the situation regarding the securing of basic human rights and freedoms in a recipient country, and to the efforts being made in that country to promote democratization. In fact the ODA Charter is still mere verbiage, and no steps have been taken to systematically apply.(6)

The government's reluctance to take active measures on East Timor can be explained by Japan's close political and economic relations with Indonesia. The Diplomatic White Paper of 1992 writes:

"Indonesia has a strong, mutually dependent economic relation with Japan through provision of oil and natural gas and acceptance of direct investment. And Indonesia is a very important country for Japan because it is located in an area with important international sea routes and because it has a large political influence in Southeast Asia. Indonesia also has a large need for development, and for this reason Japan has provided the biggest assistance, mainly in the form of economic cooperation, for the sake of the stability and advancement of the area."

Good relations with Indonesia are essential for Japanese industries. Because of these so-called "comprehensive security" considerations, Japan has allocated the biggest portion of its ODA to Indonesia for many years (this year nearly 15%). The aim of this ODA is to secure the base of the Japanese economy as a whole, not only to secure investment or other economic interests in Indonesia.

But according to a Foreign Ministry official, the independence of East Timor itself is not in conflict with Japan's interest. Only a worsening of the relation with Indonesia would be harmful.

Another factor keeping Japan from cutting aid to Indonesia is the existence of powerful ODA brokers. ODA to Indonesia has been goldmine for Japanese trading companies, consultants and construction companies. The recently exposed *Jakarta Fair* corruption scandal is a typical case. According to one newspaper, a prominent Japanese politician, evidently none other than Michio Watanabe, former Deputy Prime Minister, Foreign Minister and the chairman of the Japan-Indonesia Association, was involved. The project involved the building of an international trade fair in Jakarta. The construction of

this, the biggest fair in Asia, was completed in 1992 with a total expenditure of ¥17.2 billion, of which ¥9 billion was funded by Japanese ODA. Indonesia was going to call for international bedding on the project, but the Japanese consultant company involved threatened the Indonesian side in a letter saying that an international tender amounted to an expression of distrust in the Japanese politician concerned and would lead to unfortunate results for both countries. The international tender idea was abandoned and the Japanese plan accepted. (7)

As long as such powerful ODA brokers exist, there can be no adequate linkage of human rights and ODA. In fact, the issue of ODA is still a taboo subject in Japanese TV, which means the general public is largely ignorant of the repercussions of Japanese ODA.

There is a small sign of change in this pattern. Boss-type elder politicians are retiring and in the future bureaucrats are expected to play a more dominant role in bilateral affairs, both in Japan and Indonesia.

This is not to say that bureaucrats are necessarily better. Administrative rationalization is welcome in some respects but, at the same time it reduces the chances for the political will to lead the situation.

In the Foreign Ministry Indonesia experts, or those who studied and worked in Indonesia, form a big group, and these people tend to internalize Indonesia's proud and nationalist sentiments. Of course this special sympathy to Indonesia's nation building is not confined to diplomatic circiles, but can be found in business and academic circles as well. This mentality, sometimes mixed with feelings of guilt about Japan's past, makes it difficult for them to grasp the fact there is a people in the archipelago who can legitimately claim to have nothing to do with Indonesia's nation building.

Citizens' Movement

When the invasion occured, there were at least two ad-hoc groups in Tokyo and Osaka which demonstrated at the Indonesian embassy and the consulate. But as information from inside East Timor gradually dried up, these groups faded away.

A new wave of the solidarity movement started in 1982 when a group was formed in Kure, a city near Hiroshima. In 1985 when then Fretilin spokesperson Jose Ramos-Horta came to Japan, another group was formed in Osaka. From the next year on, East Timorese were invited to Japan every year for a speaking tour. This annual speaking tour has been successful in bringing Japanese citizens into direct contact with East Timorese, and as a result new groups have come into being. In 1988 these groups formed the Free East Timor Japan Coalition, a broad network whose main function is to coordinate the speaking tour. Presently the Coalition consists of 11 groups.

The Coalition has a broad scope of activities, from direct actions like demonstrations, post-card or letter campaigns and signature campaigns, publishing pamphlets, reports, books, videos and slide-shows, organising public meetings, seminars and symposiums and the annual speaking tour, to meetings with Japanese as well as foreign government officials and activities at international fora.

But although the grassroots movement for East Timor in Japan has grown dramatically

in the past decade from only one group to a national network of 11 groups, it is still weak in terms of systematic lobbying and is not in a position to influence the decision-making process of the government at this stage. At the same time, it is probably true that the government's recent expressions on the human rights situation in East Timor would not have appeared if the solidarity movement had not been at work.

Public Opinion

Compared to the situation ten or even five years ago, the East Timor issue is fairly well-known today among people who are interested in international affairs. At meetings and seminars on international human rights, the East Timor issue is often mentioned, and at least among human rights activists, East Timor is perceived as one of the most serious issues in Asia, together with China and Burma. But since the human rights circle itself is quite small in Japan, the general population is still largely ignorant of East Timor.

It is not that the Japanese mass media does not report on East Timor. Some journalists are well-informed, and especially after the Santa Cruz massacre, some TV stations and newspapers have reported developments. But these reports are often too small or fragmentary to make an impact on the audiences or readers. (8) Commentaries and analysis on the news items are needed to fix the issue in peoples' consciousness. But the Japanese mass media lacks consistent interest in East Timor, which is why the issue has not been the subject of editorials. As far as I know, only one regional newspaper has published an editorial on East Timor.

With respect to Japanese Parliamentarians, interest in the issue has grown with the expansion of the solidarity movement and the "Diet Members Forum on East Timor" in 1986. This is a supra-partisan group the convenors of which came from all the major political parties that existed in the Diet. The recent July election for the House of Representatives, however, has totally changed the composition of the House, so at present it is impossible to predict what shape the Forum will now take. Before the election the Forum had a little more than 90 members, approximately 10% of the whole Diet. Every year the Forum has presented a petition at the Special Committee on Decolonization, and its members communicate its concern and requests to the government on various occasions.

In December 1991, the Forum submitted a petition signed by 262 parliamentarians to the government. The petition called on the government to work for a UN Security Council resolution on the Dili shootings, the dispatch of a UN fact-finding team, and the holding of a popular referendum in East Timor.

In September 1992, in a joint action with US Congress members, 143 Japanese Diet members signed a petition to the UN Secretary-General Boutros Boutros-Ghali. The petition called on the Secretary-General to publicize the Waco report, to send a human rights monitoring team to East Timor, and to ensure that Indonesian implement the UN Human Rights Commission consensus declaration.

There have been some efforts at the level of local assemblies to express concerns on East Timor. Three city councils in the Greater Tokyo area have adopted resolutions (or a position statement) calling for a review of Japanese ODA to Indonesia. Interestingly, in

the latest case, that of the city council of Hino, the resolution was passed unanimously, which means all LDP (Liberal Democratic Party, the ruling party) members agreed to the resolution. The LDP Tokyo branch gave the green light to this resolution.

Trade unions have not shown much interest in the issue. But *Jichiro*, the trade union of local government workers, through its national network, helped a signature campaign initiated by the Free East Timor Japan Coalition calling for Prime Minister Miyazawa to review aid to Indonesia. More than 70,000 signatures were collected by November 1992.

A Prospect

In any attempt to persuade the Japanese government to play a more active role in solving the East Timor issue, the following points should be considered.

Efforts to put pressure on Indonesia should not rely on bilateral communications. Being traditionally low-profile in international politics, Japan is very reluctant to take the initiative in solving an international conflict. On the other hand it is likely to join an internationally organized action. The Japanese government dreads the possibility of a disaster in its relations with Indonesia if it applied pressure in bilateral communications. For Japan, multilateral communications with Indonesia involving other countries is the more desirable form. This multilateral approach is also in keping with the nature of the problem as a matter for international community and a matter of principle.

For comprehensive security reasons, it is dangerous for Japan to neglect its relations with Asian countries. It is therefore necessary for understanding to grow among Asian countries, particularly ASEAN countries, about the importance of the issue. There is a concern, even fear, among the countries around Indonesia for the militarization of Indonesian politics. Besides the recent successive purchases of military weapons, a widening gap between President Suharto and the military has produced a fear that something dramatic may happen in the near future. And these countries sometimes feel uncomfortable with Indonesia's proud-nationalist diplomacy. There is no reason why these countries cannot accept an independent East Timor. Indeed the existence of such a buffer state might even be desirable for them.

In the field of domestic politics, the ODA Charter can be a rallying point for the citizens' movement to demand more human rights diplomacy. But the weak position of human rights in Japan's overall diplomacy continues to be a stumbling block. International human rights is still a new theme in Japanese society itself.

There are also two legal instruments under discussion which, if they become law, will help the East Timor cause. One is an ODA law which makes human rights a conditionality in granting aid, and the other is an information law which gives citizens greater access to government documents thus enabling the public to watch government behavior more closely and effectively.

The fate of these new instruments are dependent on the political scene after the election. Japan is experiencing an unprecedented political reorganization and still needs some time to show its new face to us. The more fundamental the changes are, the more

opportunities there will be for the government to take active measures regarding East Timor. But in any case, citizens' movement will continue to be a central actor in popularizing the issue on the one hand, and then in bringing pressure on the government on the other.

Notes

(1) Education Committee, House of Representatives, Nov. 26, 1986. This was in answer to a question by Rep. Satsuki Eda.

(2) *Kyoto Shimbun*, Apr. 19, 1991. Then Deputy Minister Owada (now Vice-Minister) said, "The East Timor issue is being discussed at the UN. Human rights issues are complex, involving different cultural and social backgrounds, but there are international standards. We hope you respond sensitively and pay due consideration to the settlement of human rights problems." The Indonesian delegation was led by Director-General for Politics Wiryono.

(3) *Ibid.*, Apr. 19, 1993.

(4) *Mainichi Shimbun*, Jan. 13, 1993. The government briefing reports that Miyazawa said he appreciated measures taken by President Suharto after the Dili incident and that he requested considerations to international attention on human rights problems.

(5) Japan expressed its reservation on the fourth item of the Bangkok Declaration, "Discourage any attempt to use human rights as a conditionality for extending development assistance." The Bankok Declaration was adopted by the World Human Rights Conference Asian Regional Meeting on April 2 and reflected many Asian countries' reluctant stance on human rishts. It should al be noted that the Japanese government tried to defend the particiaption of Free East Timor Japan Coalition and International Federation for East Timor (IFET) against the Indonesian government's emotional rejection of the two NGOs. (In the end the UN decided to exclude the NGOs in order to prevent Indonesia from boycotting the Conference.)

(6) The ODA Charter was a formalization and elaboration of the ODA "Four Principles" propagated by Prime Minister Kaifu. This in turn was a response to self-critisism on the part of the donor countries who allowed the Iraqi invasion of Kuwait. The four points to be considered in providing ODA are: 1. military expenditures of the reciepient country, 2. arms exports and imports, 3. possession and development of nuclear and chemical weapons, 4. basic human rights and democracy.

Applying this to the case of Haiti, the government stopped aid to that country. Also the government at one occasion stopped new assistance to China and Burma. But the government stated, even after the Santa Cruz massacre, it would not stop aid to Indonesia.

(7) The scandal was first exposed by a Northern California daily, *San Jose Mercury News*, April 19, 1992, and subsequently picked up by Mainichi Shimbun on April 20. The San Jose article raises questions about the involvement of Michio Watanabe, but fails to show clear evidence of wrongdoing.

According to the article, in February 1990 the Overseas Economic Cooperation Fund (OECF), Japan's principal foreign-aid agency, agreed to issue a $61 million loan. The Industrial Bank of Japan, a private institution and one of the original shareholders of Jakarta Development Corp., the consultant company established by Taniguchi, Watanabe's personal aide and managing director of the Japan-Indonesian Association, to develop, finance and supply equipment to a land project in Jakarta, invested in the project. Then the OECF made a $2.9 million investment in Jakarta Development Corp.

The news about the threatening letter was reported only by *Mainichi Shimbun* on June 20, 1993, but the names of the politician and businessmen were omitted.

(8) NHK, Japan's public TV and radio station, broadcast a 45-minute program on the Santa Cruz masscre on December 18, 1991. Later a translated version of *Cold Blood* was broadcast on NHK's satelite channel. NHK subsequently reported Amos Waco's second visit to East Timor, the dissollusion of Kolakops, Suharto-Clinton meeting and other news related to East Timor.

The Japanese mass media have difficulty in covering news negative for Indonesia because of the vulnerability of their correspondents in Jakarta. One *Asahi Shimbun* correspondent was expelled from Indonesia for an article on the Tanjung Priok Incident.

For further information
Akihisa Matsuno
Osaka University of Foreign Studies
8-1-1 Aomadani-higashi,
Minoo, Osaka 562 JAPAN

tel. +81-6-321-5579 (home)
fax. +81-6-370-8314 (home)